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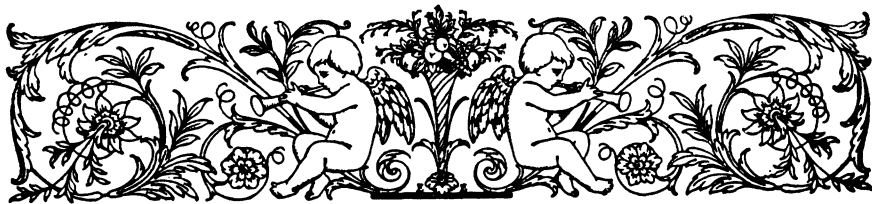
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A NEW MUSICAL OUTLOOK—AND THE WAR

By CHARLES D. ISAACSON

THERE are those who profess to have seen in the great war the death of all of that which is recognized as art. Particularly they felt that music had suffered a set-back, which to them appeared to be disastrous and far-reaching. They proclaimed the indifference to concerts, the difficulty experienced by artists in finding easy access to fortunes, the necessary abandonment of the soul satisfying arts, before the onrush of armament and all that it includes.

Those who see in that way, are either blind or near-sighted. The signs which they discerned were authentic; their significance was very contrary to their anticipations.

As a matter of fact, the war gave an impetus to music and the other arts which crowded into a few months the equivalent of years of effort. To put the matter bluntly, it seems as though the war was the best thing which ever happened to music.

The necessities of the mammoth conflict, unearthing every available aid, discovered for music its potency and admitted the rightful virtues so long denied it. Strange as it may seem, music had been very much maligned, stripped of its powers, made to serve a very narrow sphere, snubbed by the millions who knew not what they did, and generally forced into an inactivity which lessened its usefulness in thousands of ways.

Before the war, the number of people in attendance at concert-halls and operas, constituted a little less than two per cent. of our total population. Since the war began the percentage mounted perhaps to fifteen per cent.

I do not wish to exaggerate, nor is it my intention to give a wrongful impression. Hence, this article will be in the nature

of a first-hand impression of the new outlook on music and the war's connection in bringing the ideal rapidly to actuality.

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It would be Arcady to my way of thinking, to have music and art and beauty always everywhere. If everybody loved music, and could have it without stint, that very condition would presuppose a state of happiness which would be part and parcel of social and economic peace.

To be sure, a warlike nation is not a musical nation, nor will a people too deeply concerned with commerce be enthusiastic supporters of the arts. Where inequality of labor and capital exists, art appreciation starves. Yet, to turn the reverse of the coin: the introduction and the fostering of music and the arts is to hasten the best in social and economic conditions.

But away with academic discussions. To the heart of the subject, as music goes to the heart of the subject! Music was given to the people of the earth that they might all enjoy of its sweets. No less widespread than the air we breathe, it was never intended that music should become the property of a few, surrounded with templar mysteries and philosophical theorems.

Music, which makes hearts light and gives dismissal to woes,—music which was created to solace the weak and the sick, the troubled and the oppressed, music which is the world's best preacher because it never deals in words or deeds, but in something you cannot express, as subtle and spiritual as the rarest love which goes straight to the soul of man—music was always intended for all mankind. Operas were not written for a fashionable audience in a single opera house in a city of six millions. Beethoven did not live for a few to hear his symphonies and his sonatas.

Perhaps it was because music is so beautiful that from the very beginning cliques have attempted to monopolize musical appreciation. Operas were produced in magnificence and foreign tongues. Snobbery and fashion became part of the performances. Kant and cant entered into an art intended to be made of filmy simplicity. Theories and mathematics and geometry built up in a single melody!

Not so very long ago, a certain noted musical critic proclaimed this democratic idea to the world: "Music is for the sacred circle. It is a limited circle and naturally all who are not in it, are ignorant and illiterate."

To be one of that sacred circle, it was necessary to adore Wagner and shiver at a chord of Debussy, to sneer at the popular, limit yourself to the prescribed composers, deal in fine distinction of performances, and then you belonged.

With the world divided into two parts, less than two per cent. being of the elite and over ninety-eight per cent. being of the low-brow contingency, traditions naturally were made over night. Millions gladly admitted they were not music lovers. They couldn't stand opera. A symphony orchestra would drive them mad. "No, I'm low-brow alright, give me my ragtime and I'll be perfectly satisfied. Lead me to the vaudeville; and no thank you, I couldn't possibly use the passes to the concert."

Those who mingled with the musical population and their progeny have kept alive the little music world, peopled with its artists, composers, critics, listeners.

Those who were outside kept moving away, encouraged by the critics, artists, listeners, etc., while popular music grew worse, taste was lowered, operas came into worse repute, and music seemed more than ever of little use to a man or a woman who has no fads. (You cannot go by musical reviews. They mean nothing because they represent the few).

To be sure, all through history, there have always been thinkers who sought to better conditions, who sensed the unfairness of the thing and realized the need for a readjustment. Every nation and city had its musician who wanted to give music for the people. Many schemes were tried of reducing the prices; and making the concerts "pops" helped a good deal. But two essential needs were always overlooked.

The first and most important step in order to regain the people's confidence and kill those foolish superstitions concerning music, is to go among the people with the music and show them. The new idea is not to sit down and wait for the crowd to come to the concert-hall, but to carry the concert-hall to the crowd.

The man who said he did not like music, had not heard music in the right way. Music is a taste which needs only to be acquired. With some it may take a little while longer than with others, but experience has taught me that the average person needs but two or three real concerts to get the liking. Once the taste is in the soul, the hunger for music becomes almost insatiable. I have known people to go almost as insane in their desire for music as the dope-fiend seeking morphine, or the drunkard who needs his alcohol. Recently I went away on a camping trip—I was determined to forget my ordinary thoughts and live out in the open.

Though, to be sure, every brook and rustle of the trees carried a melodic message to my ears, though the birds were singing and the several in our party insisted unconsciously on humming and recalling bits of opera and the like—just the same, I realized an uncomfortable gnawing at my vitals for the need of a good hour of musical entertainment.

There is a man of my acquaintance, a head waiter by vocation and a music fan by avocation, who would sooner give up his meals than his music. In the camps I have been accosted by men who tell me that they are going mad for a concert; and one soldier at a musicale in Camp Dix, said "I'll have to go to the lockup for this. I had to come down, although I'm supposed to be working in the kitchen to-night. I couldn't miss this music." And this very fellow confessed he only acquired the liking since he had been in the army.

Then, if all that is needed to make music-lovers is to hand out samples of music, the plan of operation seems comparatively simple. And it is. For the last three years I have been following the doctrine in a big way. Wherever an organization had an auditorium and an audience, I have been arranging free concerts. Mind, they are free. They are not popular priced concerts. They are handed out freely to any interested enough to look in. A little taste is all we ask them to take; the rest is easy.

Let me show what I mean. The Young Men's Christian Association or the St. James Church, or the Marathon Social Club have regular meetings, where three hundred,—a thousand, two thousand meet. They have entertainments, they have dances, they have parties, they do not object to an evening of a new kind of *entertainment*.

If it were called a concert they might rebel—the hall might be empty. But an entertainment is different. Anybody wants to be entertained, but few wish to be educated and uplifted. If you can bring about your social work without the people knowing it—then you are getting somewhere. Homeopathic methods—sugar pellets with no taste of medicine, and very light in effect.

So an entertainment is arranged with the director, who talks and writes about it, until the place is jammed on the very first night. And how to tell the dreadful truth to the audience, now?

Here is a specimen talk of mine to a specimen crowd, at Evening School—it is in the Car-Barn section of New York City—the toughest, crudest aggregation of individuals you can imagine, mostly Irish, red-cheeked, cheeky, good-humored and lovable as can be.

I'm awfully glad to be here. I know we're going to have a good time. Last night we were over to Camp Dix, and there were some fifteen thousand soldiers. They told us to remember them to the folks back home, especially the ladies. They said if they could they would follow us around everywhere. They seem to like our little entertainment. I hope you will, too.

Now, I want to tell you a strange thing. We are supposed to do the entertaining, but as a matter of fact I am going to depend on you to do at least half of it. Let's forget we are in a big hall. Let's pretend we're in a parlor—your place at home. Let's have a little music. Here's Miss Smith, who is a famous singer. She's generally paid two hundred dollars a night. You've probably heard her on your phonograph, but the real thing is better, even though a famous violinist narrates the story of a man who told him he sounded just as good as "his phonograph record." I'm going to ask Miss Smith to do a song you all love, "Annie Laurie."

It's beautiful, isn't it? You can hear it over and over again. The oftener the better. That's the difference between poor songs and good songs. The difference between great music and the popular ragtime. Of course we all like ragtime, and the popular music. It's pretty. Anybody who says that ragtime music is no good is a snob. Don't mind him. He's a fool. When you hear a good ragtime song your feet start to click, isn't it so? You've heard of the Metropolitan Opera House. Here's a secret. Some of the best times those opera stars have is when they have a little ragtime in private. A big foreign conductor—his name is Artur Bodanzky—told me that ragtime music is wonderful. He can't hear enough of it.

But the difference is that ragtime music is only good for a little while. I'll bet you don't remember the songs you knew a year ago. Girls, you'll agree with me that the songs you had on the piano six months ago, you're sick of now.

Please, dear reader, remember that I am not talking to a collection of your friends. I am addressing the lowest of low-brows, really becoming the missionary of music in the wilderness, and actually accomplishing our purpose. I look ahead of my story. The facts come later. Let me go on with my talk:

Some people think of music as something you get in restaurants. A lady liked a certain piece of music because it was so loud, nobody could overhear her conversation. Opera she figured was an excuse for society ladies to wear their latest gowns.

Music is bigger than anything like that. It is for everybody as free as the air itself. When you come home tired and weary, from a hard day's work, the joy of a song or a simple melody, wipes out the cares.

Perhaps a little woman will nod her tired head and admit it is true.

How many of you have ever been to the opera? Tell me?

One hand is timidly raised.

Did you like it?

I loved it!

How many have ever been to real concerts?

There are three hands—think of it, three out of five hundred. Of course I have taken an extraordinary example. But here are the statistics on some fifty centres where all kinds of people have been covered, all nationalities, all walks of life. Half a million people, surely a fair basis for analysis. Never have I encountered an audience where more than fifty out of five hundred admitted to the charge of attending concerts or opera.

But behold the change, as the samples are tasted and liked. In my car-barn centre, at the fifth concert, I learned that fifteen people had tried the opera and rather liked it. Forty had essayed a paid concert and confessed they had their money's worth. At the end of a year, almost half of my five hundred listeners, were in the lists of music lovers.

But let me return to one of those early evenings, those first communions of free music.

Great music is something you get much out of. It isn't simply pretty sounds. It is a series of pictures, a set of definite actions, a continued story. All you do when you hear music is to set your imagination at work. Most people have no imagination. Most millionaires haven't any, but the Irish generally have more than their share of it—(indeed so have the Greeks and Italians and French and Americans).

What is the piano and the violin saying to you? Would you like to hear the soldiers as they march over the top? (Here the pianist plays a martial air, with the bugle calls plainly evident.) Would you like to hear a mother singing her baby to sleep, with the sound of the rocking cradle?

The audience quickly catches the idea. The method of describing actions with music which quite closely approximates it, appeals to them. But now turn the method upside down. Play something and ask the audience to "interpret" it for you. Here comes the wonder. The fresh little chap with the red cheeks says Schubert's "March Militaire" is the sound of soldiers marching on parade. The girl with the chewing gum (which she chews in time) is quite sure that Chopin's "Serenade" is a young man proposing to his lady. The audience laughs at the responses. But it's like a game. An interesting game; without them being aware of it, they are listening intently to classical music.

To be sure a gentle reproof is needed occasionally, such as when we remind the fellow who holds his ear at a coloratura's high note, that there have been some listeners we met, so narrow-minded

that they thought a beautiful voice was all within the register of the average person—whereas, indeed, florid singing is a rare and priceless gift. In fact, we tell of one young man who was so narrow-minded that he laughed at Galli-Curci (everybody knows and reveres that name to the veriest gamin on the street), and once a man was so devoid of good taste that he thought Caruso was rotten and afterwards when he was told it was Caruso, then he blushed all over.

This is the kind of entertainment which greets the unsuspecting audience, given in sugared form. To it we add community singing. We hand out a musical tonic. Everybody sings regardless of a good voice. Bad voices do not matter, we inform the audience, the principal need is to open the mouth and let the sound out. It is a great medicine—throws dignity and woes to the winds. And this “tonic” becomes an important part of the proceedings.

There are many sidelights to the sample concerts. Injected into the talks are suggestions about the phonograph.

You ought to have one, if you can afford it. If you get a piano, don't get anything cheap. A piano is a lifetime possession. It's worth considering seriously. If you used to study piano or singing, start again. Not for professional work unless you wish, but for the fun of it. Your children, my friends, don't give them the handicap of growing up without music. Home music means children staying at home. And it's a useful advantage to be able to play or sing.

Children are the most tractable music-lovers. They love music. They interpret the compositions without regard to traditions. Being devoid of self-consciousness they do not hesitate to tell you just what Beethoven's “Moonlight Sonata” means to them, even if it sounds like the waterfalls up in the country. In the schools, our concerts are now the fun period, developing an appreciation of music and of musical performance.

If all the children were to have the weekly concerts enjoyed by my young friends, in fifteen years, when they grow up, you could not find enough concert-halls and opera houses to seat them all, nor enough artists to furnish the recitals, operatic performances and symphony concerts.

This brings out my contention that musical propaganda has been all wrong, unless it approached the subject from the people's point of view. Forget the artists and musicians and composers—they will take care of themselves when the demand for their services is indicated. Art flourishes when there are people to appreciate it. Old Athens represented a universal art-loving centre.

Oberammergau made the Passion Play a success because everybody in the city was heart and soul in the work. The American city of Bethlehem has made of its Bach Choir a master-organization because it has been a community in love with music.

Take an ideal case. Suppose the City of Obgob represented a hundred per cent. of those who understood and loved to hear good music. Enough concert-halls and opera houses would be needed to house them all. There would be a great demand for artists and composers in Obgob. Young children growing up in the atmosphere of melody would be encouraged to dream out the gentle ideals of most childhood. Poetic infancy would be permitted to develop. Not only musicians would grow in every home, but painters, sculptors, writers, actors, would sprout everywhere. Around the musical heart, would come the renaissance of all the arts. Being infatuated with beauty, minds would be diverted from material woes, capital and labor struggles would lessen, prisons would go out of business.

Of course, it would be Arcadia!

But because perfection is impossible, is no reason why something approximating perfection might not be attempted. Hence, the spread of musical appreciation becomes the duty of every force for civic and private betterment. Nation, state and city should lend a hand. Educational, church and private workers should aid. Make music lovers.

And here is where I bring in the amazing facts concerning the war as the maker of music lovers.

In the camps and on the other side, concerts were demanded by the soldier population. I can only tell what I have seen myself, in camps in the East, watched carefully since the beginning of the war. The United States Government having observed the usefulness of community singing as a mower down of class distinction, introduced the idea into the camps. Every camp had a singing leader. His job was to take the men when they arrived and as often as possible thereafter, and make them happy. "Get them singing." A raw recruit when he first heard a singing leader saying, "Now, boys, let's sing," either would sneer or snicker. "Hell, is this what we came here for: to fight or to play mama's games?"

But once the fun of it was felt, the men carried on their "sings" all the time, on the march, at drill, at work, after mess. It was a great diversion. And diversion they needed, God knows. Fellows taken from the city where every step meant diversion, found themselves cooped up. So they turned to the

first entertainment they found. They turned to music because they could not help it. And the phonograph—what a gift to the soldiers! At first they would try the dance songs and pass by the classical sounding records. But a few evenings and in desperation they give up those empty sounding melodies and essayed an operatic aria. And they used it again and again, and unconsciously the realization of good music was accomplished.

Then came the big entertainments in the huts and the auditorium. Vaudeville stars thinking they knew the mentality of the men, burst forth with the very songs that were discarded from the records. Of course, looking at the women and the men and their dancing was good fun. But when artists appeared and sang and played good music,—something substantial you know,—it was best of all. Among themselves, the soldiers and sailors would sing popular music. But when they listened to artists they wanted the best there is. I have analyzed the conditions, and have found that Misha Elman, the great violinist, made a bigger hit than the prettiest girl from the Follies; that Paul Althouse, the tenor of the Metropolitan Opera House, was infinitely better applauded than the best buck-and-wing dancer on the Keith circuit; and that Florence Macbeth, the soprano of the Chicago Opera Company, was given more encores than a whole jazz band. Now, further—Elman playing the Sarasate “Gypsy Airs” was listened to more profoundly than when he did Dvořák’s “Humoresque;” Althouse in “Vesta la giubba” from “Pagliacci” brought down the house, and Speaks’ “When the Boys Come Home” was applauded but mildly in comparison; Macbeth made the rafters ring with applause for the “Titania” aria from “Mignon” much greater than when she sang “The Rosary.”

There is the case of Harold Bauer, the celebrated pianist, who declared that soldiers do not like classical music, (for they didn’t listen to Mr. Bauer). The great virtuoso had lost sight of one important thing. He had an audience of soldiers who had never attended a piano recital such as he gives in Æolian Hall in New York. They needed the view-point of understanding. That is why I always used the same tactics with the soldiers which I followed with the civilians. Create a state of mind receptive to good music; create a curious anticipation to interpret the harmonies; make the listeners keep their minds at work all the time. The reason why some concerts were not successful is that audiences had nothing to do. Now they must think all the time.

Would you think that an audience of ten thousand soldiers on a hot, blazing night in August would sit indoors for two solid

hours, silent as a tomb? Not for anything, you would imagine. Yet the entertainment which held them, consisted of a piano and violin recital, such as would have been programmed for the most serious concert-audience in the world! Think of it! Among the men, were those from farms and factories, city and hamlet, workers of all kinds. Many of them never had any use for music. Many of them had never known the slightest bit of classical melody.

They were driven to listen, true. But they were not driven to stay, nor to come again. And if you want to learn what those classical concerts have meant to hundreds of thousands in Camp Dix, Camp Upton, Camp Mills and other places, read the camp papers, ask the soldiers, ask the welfare workers, read the letters you have probably received from your friends. On the other side, General Pershing sent for song leaders and asked for concerts, and noted artists went "over there" to give opera and symphony works near the front line trenches.

The one purpose was accomplished. Men were made happier. Not only among the soldiers and sailors, but among the war-workers this same work was carried on. One instance will suffice to show what music did to increase the output of ammunition. In South Amboy was a leading establishment housing eight thousand workers, turning out fifty thousand shells a day. Laborers mingled with professional men, twelve tongues made the place like Babel. Music acted as the melting pot. The day after the first concert, the superintendent reported that the output had increased ten per cent. over any other day in the history of the plant. The officials attributed this phenomenal result to the new life and enthusiasm which had been instilled into the men and women by the concert. Concerts there meant more shells!

It created millions of new listeners, new boosters, new "customers."

It will bring results for art, in the next ten to twenty-five years. The people everywhere are breaking down old traditions. Instead of being for the clique and the few, music is coming into its own, to help, solace and brighten the lives of many. Artists, you are coming into your own, too! Composers, you are soon to be the friends of millions. Good music, you will shortly displace in popularity the popular music.

Vaudeville managers are sensing this evolution. You now find opera stars, violinists, harpists, doing a "high class" act, and they are being received with louder applause than the cheap acts.

The Society of American Singers finished last Spring a successful season in New York of opera in English. It was the first

successful venture of the kind. Those who wished to keep music for the few, resented giving music in the vernacular. But last season, English succeeded. A new kind of audience made its appearance—not society folks but real people, who came to listen and went away humming and whistling. We are entering upon the Era of the People's Art!